

## RESISTING THE IRRESISTIBLE: CULTURAL HEGEMONY AND IDEOLOGICAL CONTROL IN BARBARA KINGSOLVER'S *DEMON COPPERHEAD*

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### Abstract

*This research applies a Marxist reading to Barbara Kingsolver's *Demon Copperhead* (2022) by analyzing its take on cultural hegemony. Cultural hegemony has a sneaky way of keeping class struggle in place by pushing societal norms that maintain inequality. The rich and powerful do not just hold the money they control the stories we hear about what it means to succeed or fail. Social hierarchy and the stereotypes related to the people of Appalachia are some of the most potent examples of cultural hegemony within the text. Barbara Kingsolver richly portrays large foundations in the Appalachian region including the coal industry, the pharmaceutical industry, and the foster care system; exploits, overpower and takes control over the lives of individuals. *Demon's* growth symbolizes his resistance to these repressive systems. Furthermore, the research uses qualitative method to analyze the novel through Antonio Gramsci's insight of cultural hegemony. Resultantly, *Demon's* personal development, creative endeavors and resistance to hegemonic norms indicate a broader resistance against the capitalist structures that often oppress and exploit human beings.*

**Keywords:** Marxism, Cultural Hegemony, Consent, Coercion, Appalachia, *Demon Copperhead*, Barbara Kingsolver

### Introduction

Barbara Kingsolver's *Demon Copperhead* (2022) is a contemporary reimagining of Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*, set in modern-day Appalachia and centering on the life of a boy born into poverty, addiction, and systemic neglect. With vivid realism and deep compassion, Kingsolver explores the structural forces that shape the lives of marginalized individuals in this region particularly the destructive legacies of the coal and pharmaceutical industries. Drawing inspiration from Dickens's social critique, Kingsolver uses her narrative not only to tell the story of an individual's coming-of-age but also to expose the mechanisms through which power is sustained and inequality reproduced. This research paper examines the novel through the lens of cultural hegemony, a theory most prominently developed by the Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci.

Cultural hegemony plays a huge role in shaping people's lives and futures, especially those who belong to marginalized groups. What makes this kind of dominance so deceptive is that it does not rely on force. Instead, the ruling class has managed to make their own values, beliefs, and

norms seem like the default so much so that most of society just goes along with them without thinking twice. This keeps the existing social order in place, even when it works against the interests of those who are less privileged. In his book *The Logic of Practice*, Bourdieu aptly states, “The most successful ideological effects are those which have no need for words, and ask no more than complicitous silence” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 133). Essentially, cultural hegemony is not about strong-arming people, it is about making certain ideas and behaviors feel so natural and unavoidable that they’re accepted as the only way things can be. Because of this, folks who are born into the lower rungs of society often find themselves stuck in a system that rationalizes their struggles as something predetermined and unchangeable. They do this through institutions like schools, media, and even churches, spreading the idea that success is all about personal effort while downplaying the systemic obstacles that keep the poor from getting ahead. Chomsky summed it up well in his book *Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies*, that “The smart way to keep people passive and obedient is to strictly limit the spectrum of acceptable opinion, but allow very lively debate within that spectrum” (Chomsky, 1989, p. 43). Basically, they control the narrative so tightly that people start to believe poverty is a personal failing rather than a result of bigger social and political issues. This concept has been a dominant feature of our society and yet there is always the possibility of resistance. Foucault in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* reminds us that “where there is power, there is resistance” (Foucault, 1978, p. 95), suggesting that even the most unescapable systems of control certainly generate opposition. People and societies, despite the fact that they are often excluded, are able to reclaim their voice and oppose the oppressive discourses. Resistance can be passive or active, and may range from the mere negation of authority to the open rebellion.

*Demon Copperhead* is a modern-day adaptation of Charles Dickens’ *David Copperfield*, transposed to the rural Southern Appalachian of southwestern Virginia. The story traces the course of Demon, a child raised in abject poverty by a teenage single mother grappling with addiction. Demon’s resilient voice touches on themes of opioid abuse, foster care, poverty and systemic neglect. At its heart, the tale is a personal coming-of-age but it also is a searing social critique on the injustices of modern America. Kingsolver’s *Demon Copperhead* channels several themes in a vivid, intricately woven tale of Demon. The novel offers a scalding indictment of systemic injustice of the shortcomings of systems such as foster care, public education, health care, etc. Demon’s mother and others become addicts themselves, part of a larger crisis that has been driven by pharmaceutical greed and social complacency. It is impressive the way Demon’s voice still cuts through his surroundings, snarky and vibrant in the face of ceaseless obstacles. Kingsolver employs Demon’s awakening and resistance to illustrate the agony of being tagged and tossed aside by society, but she also illuminates the redemptive power of love, friendship, and bravery. Characters like Angus, the mother figure who raises him, and Tommy Waddell, the kindly coach, offer rare depictions of real tenderness, while characters like Fast Forward and Dori pull back the curtain on the addictive undertow of trauma.

In the novel, the idea of cultural hegemony as articulated by Antonio Gramsci helps to illuminate that societal norms perpetuate social and economic hierarchies. Gramsci’s notion underscores how the ruling class maintains control through the dissemination of its own values and norms, which are then accepted as the cultural standard by society at large. As Gramsci (1971) observes in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, “the ruling class, while taking the initiative to solve the problems posed by certain actions of the subordinate classes, does so in such a way as to entrench and perpetuate their own ideological hegemony” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 163). The stereotypes associated with Appalachians, such as being ignorant or lazy, further

illustrate Gramsci's theory. These negative labels help sustain the cultural hegemony of dominant groups by justifying the marginalized status of Appalachian communities.

Further, cultural hegemony refers to the way a dominant class maintains control not just through force but by winning the consent of the subordinated through the dissemination of dominant values and norms, especially through institutions like education, media, religion, and health. This consent is often so deeply embedded in everyday life that it appears natural or common sense rather than imposed. In *Demon Copperhead*, the coal companies' control over education, health, and employment exemplifies how hegemony operates by shaping the consciousness of the people in the region. Mr. Armstrong's recounting of how coal companies monopolized resources like land, hospitals, and schools exemplifies this control. He states, "What the companies did, he told us, was put the shut hole on any choice other than going into the mines... they let the schools go to rot" (Kingsolver, 2022, pp. 260-262). It illustrates how they not only controlled the economy but also controlled the cultural narrative making mining seem like the only legitimate or possible future. "The supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as domination and as intellectual and moral leadership. It exercises hegemony by gaining the spontaneous consent of the masses through the apparatuses of civil society" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 57). The pharmaceutical companies manufacture consent by embedding their ideology into medical discourse and public health policy. This aligns with notion of cultural hegemony power that is maintained when the ruling class's worldview becomes the accepted norm, even among those it harms.

The novel sharply portrays the dynamics of resistance and counter-hegemony as theorized by Antonio Gramsci. The war of position refers to establishing alternative cultural and political alliances to oppose and disrupt the hegemonic structure. Demon's potential in art combined with the support of Tommy and his art teacher, demonstrates his explicit resistance to the circumstances that the hegemonies of his resistance often prescribe for him. Although his community is gripped by addiction and refuses support from the system, his development in these areas becomes a force to reckon with. This is encapsulated in his reflection, "To me that says I had a fighting chance" (Kingsolver, 2022, p. 8). His fascination with superheroes and his artistic expressions, like drawing Stoner as a super villain, underscore his resistance to the deterministic view of his future. Gramsci's concept of counter-hegemony is evident here, as Demon's engagement with creative outlets represents a form of ideological struggle against the dominant narratives that confine him. Gramsci's assertion that the challenge for the subordinate groups is to construct a 'war of position', which entails building a new hegemonic block that can eventually lead to the overthrow of the ruling class hegemony reflects Demon's journey. His efforts to transcend his circumstances through personal growth and artistic expression align with Gramsci's idea of constructing a new cultural and political space that resists hegemonic control.

By applying Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, this research reveals the subtle mechanisms through which power maintains itself in democratic societies not by overt repression, but through internalized consent. It demonstrates that literature serves as a site of ideological struggle, where dominant discourses can be both reinforced and resisted and it is relevant in light of ongoing discussions about class, addiction, and institutional failure in the United States.

### Research Questions

These are the research questions made by researchers that helped in the analyses of the text;

1. How does Barbara Kingsolver depict the role of societal norms in perpetuating cultural hegemony, and how does the ideology contribute to the maintenance of poverty and drug addiction in *Demon Copperhead*?

2. How does protagonist's growth and development serve as a form of resistance against the injustices embedded in the capitalist society of the novel?

### Literature Review

Academic reviews and articles often provide unique perspectives on an author's work, guiding researchers to explore more deeply, especially in ongoing studies. The current research also takes insights from the previous research based on the cultural hegemonic analysis. Many scholars have discussed the deadly impacts of cultural hegemony.

Muhammad Habibur Rahman (2017) have conducted the research with the title "*Cultural Hegemony at Novel Merpati Kembar in Lombok (Twin Pigeons in Lombok) by Nuriadi: About Antonio Gramsci's Hegemony Analysis*". The purpose of this work was to find out the type of a cultural hegemony presented in the novel. Hegemony theory by Antonio Gramsci was adopted for the analysis of this study while the method employed was descriptive qualitative research.

The scholarly research by Fajrul Falah named as "*Ideological Hegemony in the Novel Ayat-Ayat Cinta by Habiburrahman el Shirazy (A Study of Gramsci's Hegemony)*" (2018) the objective was to find out the ideological hegemony present in novel. Therefore, this study, which employed a descriptive-analytic approach in view of applying Gramsci's theory of hegemony, asserted that the novel is a portrayal of a hegemonic campaign of religious world-view, which in this case is the Islamic religion.

Filyadi Gusti Zamzami's (2019) research entitled *The effect of Hegemony on Animal Life in George Orwell's Novel Animal Farm*, the main purpose was to identify the nature of hegemonic acts and their influence on the lives of animals. Based on the nature of the study, a qualitative research design was employed in the study through adopting a sociologist perspective where theories from Antonio Gramsci and Max Weber on hegemony and power were used.

Nurin Naufina (2020) carried out a study on the life of '*Patriarchal Domination in Louise O'Neill's Only Ever Yours*'. This study focused on understanding the discovery of the patriarchal structure in the novel and how it has been depicted. This piece of work used literary criticism as well as the sociological method, using the hegemonic theory by Gramsci as well as Walby's patriarchal concept.

Ninda Febrina Ningrum (2017) presented research on Colonial Hegemony on natives in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Novels: *Earth of Mankind*. The study was intended to identify the ways through which colonial power was manifested in the native society as well as the countering that was initiated by the native society.

Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* was analyzed by Dr. Syrrina Ahsan Ali Haque, Hina Iqbal, Naghmana Siddique and Asia Saeed (2020). In *Home Fire* (2017), Kamila Shamsie talks about works and conflicts of Muslim characters who do not give up their privileges to follow cultural dominance.

Shaymaa Neamah Mohammed ALMKHELIF (2022) applies it on the *Things Fall Apart* (1958) by Chinua Achebe. He during the analysis says that cultural hegemony is manifested through ideology and culture since the dominating power is able to impose its culture through a process of coercion. This phenomenon is especially pertinent in Cultural and Postcolonial approaches and was best described by Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony in the face of Mussolini's Fascist regime.

This literature review provides a solid foundation for applying cultural hegemonic analysis to Barbara Kingsolver's novel which is under analysis. Scholars like Muhammad Habibur Rahman, Fajrul Falah, and others have used Gramsci's theory to reveal how dominant ideologies control societal norms and individual behaviors. While Barbara Kingsolver's novels frequently



explore themes of social hierarchy, cultural hegemony and stereotypes, identity, family, and resilience. This is a gap in scholarship regarding how these themes intersect with issues of cultural hegemony in her work, particularly within the context of the novel. Existing analyses focuses on the social and economic challenges faced by characters like Demon. Filling this gap provides a deeper understanding of the socio-political dimensions in the novel and highlights Kingsolver's critique of capitalist society and her exploration of resistance against systemic injustices.

### Research Methodology

This research employs qualitative textual analysis, where primary data is collected through systematic reading and analysis of key passages, characters, and plot developments that illustrate cultural hegemony, ISAs, RSAs and resistance in *Demon Copperhead* (2022). Findings are interpreted through the lenses of Marxist theory, Gramsci's hegemony and ideological critique within *Demon Copperhead* (2022). In literary examination, the exploration is text-driven and text directs understanding. That's why, this exploratory research benefits from textual analysis. The other tools which are used to investigate the research questions are critical books and articles that are published on this framework. Internet researches, library and visits remain important throughout this research.

According to Nyoman Kutha Ratna (2007), "Hegemony is derived from word 'hegeisthai'. In Greek it means 'lead' or 'leadership', powers that surpass other powers. So lexicographically hegemony means 'leadership'. But in everyday life, the term is frequently connected with control" (Ratna, 2007, p. 175). Hegemony is always understood in the context of policy whereby the world view and the power of social group role representations (whether they are classes, sex, culture or race) are conserved (Barker, 2004, p. 62). Hegemony is defined as domination by one group against another, with or without the threat of violence, so that ideas dictated by the dominant group to the controlled group are accepted as the fair and unbalanced mind. Gramsci's considerations on legislative issues and culture were shaped during a time of rout: the squashing of laborers' rebellions in Europe and the disappointment of the Italian joint development in its battles with manufacturing plant proprietors, the Italian state, and Mussolini's Extremists. Gramsci was not the originator of the idea of hegemony. "Even though Gramsci claimed that "Ilich," the name he used for Lenin in the *Prison Notebooks* (1971) was responsible for the concept and the fact of hegemony, Lenin rarely explicitly uses the term hegemony" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 381).

Gramsci argued that a revolutionary overthrow of the state in Western democracies would require a different approach than the one used in Russia. He believed that Western societies had developed an intricate network of political clusters and organizations that were deeply integrated into bourgeois society. This intricate system would need to be disentangled before any revolution could succeed. In Western Europe, trade unions, social-democratic parties, and a well-paid 'labour aristocracy' acted as political superstructures that hindered direct revolutionary action. "These superstructures necessitated a long-term strategy for revolution, contrasting with the more immediate approach taken by the Bolsheviks in Russia" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 16). Gramsci distinguished between the revolutionary action in Russia and what was needed elsewhere. In Russia, the political superstructure was ineffectively evolved early on and thick, as he portrayed it. So, there were not many go-betweens between the Tsarist system and its progressive rivals. Because of this, the Bolsheviks could concentrate solely on acquiring state power. Gramsci termed this approach a war of manoeuvre. However, he noted that such rapid and decisive transformations were rare and typically occurred in situations where the political superstructure was underdeveloped. In contrast, Western capitalist nations had anticipated significant opposition to their rule and organized themselves with a tightly woven network of practices and institutions

designed to prevent internal disintegration. This made a direct assault on the state—a “war of manoeuvre”—politically and psychologically impossible. Instead, Gramsci argued for a “war of position,” a protracted struggle fought within the superstructure where meanings and values are contested over time. “This approach involved gradually building cultural and ideological influence within civil society, laying the groundwork for eventual revolutionary action against capitalist society” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 108).

Gramsci’s idea of authority spins around the mind-boggling connection between coercion and consent. He contended that administering classes keep up with power through direct power, yet it also accomplishes circuitous control (consent) over society’s social standards, values, and establishments. Intimidation is the development of force from the predominant gathering by utilizing savage contraptions like the police. “Consent is the power manor of the prevailing gathering that is completed by acquiring a concurrence with the subordinate gathering so they can acknowledge it honestly” (Faruk, 2017, p. 135). Coercion refers to the use of force or threat of force by the state to maintain control. It includes the police, military, legal system, and other repressive apparatuses. Consent refers to the ruling class’s ability to shape the way people think and behave through seemingly neutral institutions like education, media, and religious organizations. Gramsci emphasized the importance of the balance between coercion and consent. While coercion is always present, an effective hegemony relies more heavily on consent. By shaping cultural norms, the ruling class can make their dominance seem natural and inevitable, reducing the need for overt force. Gramsci acknowledged that hegemony is not static. Subordinated groups can develop their own counter-hegemonic ideologies, challenging the dominant culture through social movements, alternative media, and cultural expressions.

### Analysis and Discussions

This study undertakes a Marxist literary analysis of Barbara Kingsolver’s *Demon Copperhead*, with particular emphasis on Antonio Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony. Gramsci theorized that capitalist domination is not sustained solely through explicit coercion but through the subtle inculcation of ideology, whereby the subordinate classes come to accept and internalize the values and norms of the ruling elite. In *Demon Copperhead*, Kingsolver vividly dramatizes the mechanisms of this ideological control by foregrounding how dominant institutions in the Appalachian region—namely the coal industry, pharmaceutical companies, and the foster care apparatus—function as hegemonic structures. These institutions are portrayed not merely as economic or organizational systems, but as ideological state apparatuses that systematically erode individual autonomy and reinforce class-based oppression. Through this critical lens, the novel is revealed as a trenchant commentary on the insidious workings of cultural domination under late capitalism, while also charting the contours of resistance embodied in the protagonist’s journey.

Gramsci’s insight that hegemony is sustained through the consent of the governed is pivotal to understanding the novel’s socio-political critique. He observes that “the ruling class maintains its authority not just through coercion but by securing the consent of the governed” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 12), a process Kingsolver explores through her portrayal of internalized social stigmas and inherited narratives of worthlessness. From its opening pages, the novel exposes the cultural scripts imposed upon the marginalized. Demon’s birth is enveloped in a community discourse laden with fatalism and disdain, encapsulated in his declaration: “Anybody will tell you the born of this world are marked from the get-out, win or lose” (Kingsolver, 2022, p. 9). This statement captures a hegemonic ideology that pathologizes poverty and addiction, positioning them not as consequences of structural inequality but as inherent deficits. By naturalizing failure as destiny for

the poor, such beliefs reproduce the ideological status quo and foreclose possibilities for mobility or resistance, an effect Kingsolver critiques with pointed irony and empathetic realism.

### **Cultural Hegemony in Appalachia and Social Stereotypes**

The setting for *Demon's* home is in time and space, particularly in a given geographical and socio-economic context. As for the perspective of Antonio Gramsci's theory, the fact that the description of the *Demon's* home is shaped by the ingredient of power and its implication on the people means that power structures and the dominant ideology determine the lived experiences of the people living in the small town or city. "Dead in the heart of Lee County" (Kingsolver, 2022, p. 9). *Demon's* home in rural Appalachia is central and isolated to underline the degree of remoteness and isolation that both manifest and characterize many of the settings in Appalachia. The isolation is physical and socio-economic, as evidenced by the reference to the Ruelynn coal camp, and the settlement known simply as right Poor. The coal camp can be understood as a community dependent on the coal industry; the collapse after the tapering of the Industrial era left this and many other communities in Appalachia with nothing but the ash of what was left of their home mining industry.

*Demon's* experience of Knoxville serves as a powerful commentary on the divide between rural and urban life, and it illuminates several key themes in the novel, including stereotypes, fate versus free will, and cultural hegemony. "It turns out, the worst shit people can think of to do to each other up home is also thought of and done in Knoxville. Probably more so" (Kingsolver, 2022, p. 26). This undermines the stereotype that rural communities are uniquely troubled or deficient. It suggests that issues of violence and moral decay are universal, challenging the narrative that paints rural areas in a particularly negative light. *Demon's* initial expectations of the city are shaped by media portrayals.

Another significant example of cultural hegemony is seen through *Demon's* relationship with Mr. Ghali (mistakenly referred to as Mr. Golly), which underscores issues of cultural misrepresentation and stereotyping. Mr. Ghali's experience of cultural misrepresentation resonates with the stereotyping and marginalization of the Appalachian people. Mr. Ghali's name, changed by the local community to Mr. Golly reflects a broader trend where dominant cultural groups reshape minority identities to fit their own understandings and prejudices. The alteration of Mr. Ghali's identity parallels that Appalachian people are often reduced to stereotypes. Just as Mr. Ghali's cultural identity is oversimplified and misinterpreted. "I was surprised, but he said I was not the lone ranger, everybody in the county thought it was Golly's Market" (Kingsolver, 2022, p. 161) and "The rich and diverse culture of Appalachia is frequently reduced to derogatory labels like hillbilly or redneck" (Kingsolver, 2022, p. 69). These stereotypes obscure the complexities of Appalachian life and culture, reinforcing a cultural hegemony that marginalizes and misrepresents the region. Additionally, Mr. Ghali's stories about his childhood in India challenge the dominant cultural narratives about poverty and resourcefulness.

*Demon* identifies a similar kind of societal hierarchy in the United States, particularly in his experience growing up in Appalachia. He resonates with Mr. Ghali's no-toucher status, reflecting on his own social ostracization due to his socioeconomic background. This ostracization is evident in the prejudices and stereotypes he faces, which serve to perpetuate a social hierarchy that keeps people like him marginalized. By drawing this parallel, Kingsolver critiques the cultural hegemony in the U.S. that functions similarly to the caste system in India. The novel suggests that the discriminatory attitudes and stereotypes towards people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, like those in Appalachia, are mechanisms of cultural hegemony that maintain social inequality. Through Mr. Ghali's story and *Demon's* reflections, Kingsolver exposes that cultural

norms and systemic prejudices work to sustain social hierarchies and limit the potential for upward mobility among the marginalized.

### **The Foster Care System as Ideological and Repressive Apparatus**

Cultural hegemony is vividly portrayed through the foster care system, overseen by the Department of Social Services (DSS). This system, ostensibly designed to protect and nurture vulnerable children, often ends up exploiting them for labor and profit. Mrs. McCobb's statement about taking in a foster child reflects the intersections of cultural hegemony and economic motivation within the foster care system. Her initial reluctance, followed by the decision to accept a foster child primarily for financial gain, highlights the commodification of vulnerable individuals within capitalist frameworks. By acknowledging that the DSS stipend might help their financial situation, Mrs. McCobb underscores the economic incentives driving the decision to foster, rather than a genuine commitment to the welfare of the child." But hopefully having that little bit extra every month from the DSS would turn things around. Plus, they were being good Christians, and if it came up at school, I was to say that" (Kingsolver, 2022, p. 132). Furthermore, Mrs. McCobb's reference to being good Christians and advising Demon to present their foster care arrangement as a noble act if questioned at school illustrates how cultural and moral justifications are employed to mask underlying economic motives.

Similarly, Crickson's characterization as a "meaner breed" and the hounds symbolize the brutality and inhumanity of the foster care system under his watch. His physical description, with a red face and greasy comb-over evokes a sense of untrustworthiness and moral corruption. The term slave boys starkly contrast with the supposed benevolence of the foster care system, highlighting the systemic neglect and abuse of power. "No sir, Creaky had his slave boys, and we were a shit show" (Kingsolver, 2022, p. 72). The description of their work as a shit show and their treatment as slave boys can be seen as a critique of the ideological justifications used to rationalize such exploitation. Creaky's portrayal of his harsh management of the foster boys as a form of Christian benevolence is an example of how he uses ideological justification to rationalize and legitimize his exploitation of the children, masking the capitalist motivations behind his actions. This reflects how cultural hegemony operates to normalize and justify exploitation by embedding it within broader ideological frameworks.

### **Corporate Exploitation: Coal and Pharmaceuticals**

Barbara Kingsolver richly portrays large foundations in the Appalachian region including the coal industry, the pharmaceutical industry, and the foster care system, exploit and overpower individuals and makes them of their agency and control over their lives. Mr. Armstrong, a teacher, explains that coal companies organized their industry to own the churches, schools, and stores to make sure that any competing industries were shut down. When coal mining failed, these companies left the region in economic collapse, with the people of Appalachia surrounded in poverty and devoid of alternatives. In Mr. Armstrong's background project, the students of Lee County learn about their ancestral ties to the coal mining industry and the deep-rooted impact it has had on their community. Almost every family in the class has a history connected to coal mining, whether their great-grandparents immigrated to work in the mines or were already living in the area. This historical context illustrates that the coal companies exploited the land and the people, buying up properties without disclosing the valuable coal deposits underneath. This led to generations of families working in harsh, dangerous conditions, with children as young as those in the class laboring in the mines. "They told stories of all the kids in a family ending up working in a mine underneath the same land that was bought from them highlights the cyclical nature of exploitation, where families lost their land only to end up toiling beneath it" (Kingsolver, 2022, p. 258).



Bettina's presentation, titled "The Other Side of the Coin" serves as a mechanism through which Kingsolver unveils the reality of the coal mining industry from a child's perspective" (Kingsolver, 2022, p. 258). Children, often perceived as innocent and honest, can reveal truths that adults might obscure or overlook due to societal conditioning or personal biases. Bettina's attempt to showcase her family's supposed benevolence by pointing out their contributions to the community (such as park benches) inadvertently sheds light on the exploitative practices of the coal mining company.

The novel draws a parallel between the historical exploitation by coal companies and the contemporary exploitation by pharmaceutical companies. Just as the coal companies manipulated economic conditions to maintain control and profit, pharmaceutical companies prey on the vulnerabilities of the Appalachian community. They flood the region with addictive painkillers, capitalizing on the lack of adequate medical care and economic despair. These companies, much like the coal companies before them, exploit the community for profit, perpetuating cycles of addiction and poverty. The deceptive impact of pharmaceutical companies demonstrates that capitalist interests which deliberately exploit and disseminate societal weaknesses to maximize profit. Characters like Kent and Dr. Watts spread the ideologies of Pharmaceutical Companies to gain their materialist gain. Kent is Aunt June's boyfriend who is a pharmaceutical representative. Kent's job consists of trying to get doctors to prescribe opioid painkillers more often. As Aunt June sees more and more of the damage that opioids have done to Appalachia, she comes to think of Kent and the pharmaceutical companies he represents as murderers.

Moreover, Dr. Watts, as a representative of pharmaceutical interests, contributes to this cycle by prescribing Lortab, which not only masks Demon's pain but also introduces him to a potent drug that will likely lead to dependency. The prescription would last until then, and as the Lortab kicked in, its soothing effect made me feel calm and blissful, like cruising down Main Street with a comforting companion (Kingsolver, 2022, p. 310). For children like Demon, the pervasive presence of drug addiction in their surroundings makes it a normalized, almost expected aspect of life. Schools and parents, many of whom are themselves addicted or influenced by pharmaceutical companies' narratives, perpetuate a culture where drug dependency is both common and accepted.

Demon's mother's addiction creates a home environment where substance abuse is normalized and integrated into daily life. The presence of pills and her frequent states of intoxication serve as constant reminders of the pervasive drug culture that has infiltrated their lives. This environment not only exposes Demon to drug use but also desensitizes him to the dangers and consequences of addiction. As, "She's in the bedroom. Lying there in her clothes, shoes and all, passed out" (Kingsolver, 2022, p. 52). The environment within foster homes, such as Crickson's, significantly contributes to the normalization and perpetuation of drug addiction among children. In the same way, "He passed around cigarettes and we smoked those. Creaky allowed smoking in the house, which was new to me" (Kingsolver, 2022, p. 72). It significantly contributes to the normalization and perpetuation of drug addiction among children. "Our schools had smoking barrels. Teachers smoked on their breaks, kids at recess" (Kingsolver, 2022, p. 99). The normalization of smoking within schools exemplifies how educational institutions can inadvertently contribute to the acceptance of harmful behaviors, thereby reinforcing broader societal issues like addiction.

### **Individual Resistance: Demon's Journey**

Gramsci emphasizes on the importance of cultural resistance and ideological work, before political change can occur, there must be intellectual and cultural groundwork, which is the essence of counter-hegemonic action. As, "Every revolution has been preceded by an intense labor of criticism, by the diffusion of culture and the spread of ideas" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 324). Demon's

artistic talents and encouraged by Tommy and the art teacher at his school, serve as a beacon of hope amidst the darkness. The input from Tommy, the other allies, and the art teacher ultimately gives Demon a voice and identity and keeps him from slipping into the system. Despite his challenging circumstances, Demon's narrative voice and reflections hint at an underlying resilience and resistance against societal injustices. "To me that says I had a fighting chance" (Kingsolver, 2022, p. 8). And, "I was a born sucker for the superhero rescue" (Kingsolver, 2022, p. 9). Demon's acknowledgment of his fighting chance and his fascination with superheroes symbolize his intrinsic desire to overcome adversity. His struggle against the prejudiced society and his ability to resist its pressures were the prerequisites, which indicated that he would be able to resist the oppressive structures of the capitalist society throughout the text.

Demon's deep-seated fascination with the ocean and his contemplative relationship with water is expressed within the novel. It symbolizes his resistance against the encroachments of his troubled environment and his desire for escape and freedom. I've always been fascinated by the ocean. "While other kids might focus on memorizing dinosaur names or similar interests, I was captivated by whales and sharks" (Kingsolver, 2022, p. 9). Demon's fascination with the ocean, whales, and sharks represents a longing for escape from his harsh reality. Unlike other children who might fixate on more conventional interests, Demon's focus on the vast, unbounded ocean reflects his desire for something beyond the confines of his immediate environment. The ocean symbolizes a realm of freedom and boundless possibility, contrasting sharply with the restrictive and exploitative conditions he faces in the Appalachian region.

Demon's approach to drawing superheroes and his consideration of their superpowers reflects his deep power of observation and understanding of personal identity. By transforming Creaky into a malevolent figure with a comical but sinister light-bulb head, Demon allegorizes the cruelty and scheming nature of oppressive authority figures. The exaggerated features and villainous plans underscore Creaky's abuse of power and his role as an antagonist in Demon's life. This portrayal challenges the hegemonic power structures that normalize or downplay the abuse and exploitation within the foster care system. By depicting Creaky as a supervillain, Demon criticizes the dehumanizing and punitive practices that are often hidden behind institutional facades. Demon's artistic depiction of superheroes with the power to eradicate injustice also critiques the current societal structures that perpetuate these problems. By suggesting that such issues require superhuman abilities to resolve, he implicitly criticizes the failure of existing systems and institutions to adequately address and rectify these deep-rooted issues.

Besides, *Fast Forward*'s influence provided Demon with a sense of possibility and agency in the face of systemic adversity. "A person can keep his head up and rise high, even if he wasn't lucky enough to get born up there. In all the years of no adult ever taking my side, he showed me it was possible to work them at their own game and win" (Kingsolver, 2022, pp. 150-151). It reflects a counter-hegemonic perspective that challenges prevailing notions of predetermined social outcomes and underscores the role of individual determination and strategic action in overcoming structural limitations. It describes a counter-hegemonic sentiment, pushing back against the dominant ideology that suggests one's social position is fixed and largely determined by the circumstances of their birth. It promotes the idea that resilience and determination can enable individuals to overcome disadvantages and achieve success despite their socio-economic background.

Demon responds to the exploitation of people by coal companies and attempts to counter hegemonic narratives through creative expression. By drawing a comic strip featuring a superhero miner who fights against the oppressive coal companies, Demon channels his frustration and

resistance into a form of artistic counter-hegemony. “I drew a lot and kept to myself. I envisioned a comic strip about an old-time miner superhero challenging the company, and I’d ask Ms. Annie for tips on making him look authentic” (Kingsolver, 2022, p. 260). This initial act of drawing pictures and maintaining silence represents Demon’s method of coping with and resisting the exploitation he observes. The Demon makes protests through drawing. It is a way of reflecting on what he sees and expressing his supreme dissatisfaction with the world order.

### Conclusion

In *Demon Copperhead*, Barbara Kingsolver masterfully uncovers the layers of cultural hegemony embedded within the socio-economic landscape of Appalachia, showcasing the subtle yet powerful ways in which dominant ideologies sustain systemic inequalities. Through a Marxist lens by Antonio Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony, this research has explored how societal norms and stereotypes—particularly those targeting the impoverished communities of Appalachia—serve to uphold the interests of powerful capitalist structures. The novel illustrates how institutions such as the coal industry, pharmaceutical companies, and the foster care system play integral roles in perpetuating exploitation. These institutions function not only as mechanisms of material control but also as ideological apparatuses, reinforcing a social order that marginalizes and disempowers the working class. Kingsolver’s depiction of Demon’s personal struggles—beginning with the stigma surrounding his birth and continuing through his experiences of addiction and social isolation—reveals the depth of cultural hegemony that operates in everyday life. At the core of *Demon Copperhead* lies the protagonist’s journey of resistance, mirroring Gramsci’s concept of the organic intellectual. Results of this study shows that as Demon grows and develops, his increasing awareness of the systems that oppress him signals the potential for rebellion against both overt and covert forces of cultural domination. His resistance is not just through actions but also through the reclamation of his personal narrative and identity. By challenging the hegemonic structures imposed on him, Demon becomes a symbol of resistance against the capitalist systems that seek to define and control the lives of individuals based on profit and power.

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